

PURDUE NORTH CENTRAL STUDENT WRITING



PORTALS

Vol. 8 Fall 1979

Vol. 9 Fall 1980



**PURDUE NORTH CENTRAL
STUDENT WRITING**

PORTALS

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Vol. 8 Fall 1979

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FOREWORD

This is a combined edition of *PORTALS*, the eighth and ninth. The inflationary spiral of production costs finally interrupted the eight-year continuity of a fine tradition, a yearly publication of PNC student writing; and for awhile we feared that increasing costs of typesetting and printing were luxuries we could no longer afford.

Beginning this year, however, Purdue North Central's new in-house production facilities make possible the revival of the *PORTALS* tradition. The Student Senate has generously appropriated, we are happy to report, a budget both for this edition and for a regular edition in the spring of 1981.

Selections included in this edition consist of the 1979 and 1980 prize-winning entries; and though we have not the space to include, as we usually do, numerous honorable-mention pieces, we indeed wish to acknowledge the authors whose names and titles appear in the table of contents.

All entries in the Freshman Contest were written by students enrolled in freshman English courses at PNC; the Open Contest includes work submitted by any students taking courses at PNC. All entries are keyed by numbers so that the judges, consisting of faculty and students, do not know the author's identities and frequently award more than one prize to the same author, as is the case in this edition. By using a simple numerical scale, they evaluate each selection on the basis of writing excellence.

PORTALS has always presented a truly representative sampling of PNC students' work; we encourage entries from every school, every age group, full and part-time students, men and women, graduates and undergraduates.

DIRECTORS, STUDENT WRITING CONTESTS:

1979 - Professor Roger Schlobin
1980 - Professor Barbara Lootens

EDITORIAL DIRECTORS:

1979 - Professor John Stanfield
1980 - Professor Barbara Lootens

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR:

Professor Hal Phillips

FACULTY JUDGES:

Professors John Pappas, John Stanfield, Roger Schlobin,
Barbara Lootens, Hal Phillips

STUDENT JUDGES:

1979 - Karen Spolyar, Renee De Roner, Terry Hellman
1980 - Karen Spolyar, Susan Howard, Carolyn Barnard, Carol Neyhart

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Edward Erslovas	<i>Fantasy</i>
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FRESHMAN CONTEST - 1979
First Prize Winner

THE UNDERRATED VALUE OF THE COMIC STRIP

One of our most common sources of humor is the newspaper comic pages. We laugh, chuckle, and ruefully shake our heads over the latest escapades of "Dennis the Menace", "Archie and His Gang", and "Charlie Brown, Lucy, and Snoopy". Of course, the obvious intent of the comic strip is to provoke laughter, but we often come away provoked, too, with a new insight into human nature.

The comic strip, "Peanuts", is a fine example of tempering subtle humor with a deeper awareness of ourselves and the people around us. Charles Schulz, the creator of the comic strip, has effectively peopled an imaginary world with appealing, amusing, and lovable characters who capture our affection with their naturalness. We understand each figure as we would a friend, and we can usually predict what his reaction to any situation will be. Yet, our amusement is often mingled with a new awareness of individuality which is frequently overlooked within the context of our daily routines.

"Peanuts" is a comment on life in general, and it is a comment on human nature in specifics. Through his understated humor, Charles Schulz reminds us that much of life is disappointment, and that our individuality stems from how we pick up the pieces of our shattered illusions and fit them together again. Living demands a price from each of us; what makes us unique is how we each pay that price.

"Peanuts" reminds us that human nature is often perverse. Charlie Brown will wander through life, ineffective and trusting. Everything will turn out right for him in the end, because mankind will always forgive an ineffectual bungler who is consistently blind to shortcomings and unkindnesses. Those who accept mankind for what it is, either blindly or with full awareness and forgiveness, enjoy a peace of mind that other temperaments never find.

Lucy will always find her place in life. Hardheaded, aggressive, and knowing fully the direction in which she is headed, she will forcefully carve her niche. You may not like her, but you will surely respect her.

With our sometimes rueful laughter comes the knowledge that we have to accept life with a grain of salt and human nature with a shrug. People are what they are, not what we wish them to be, and rejection of that truth is only futile.

The "Peanuts" characters stumble through situation after situation, somehow managing to adapt to the complexities of an adult world and yet retaining their individualities. While expounding great philosophical themes in everyday terms, they still remain children in the contexts in which they are placed and in their reactions to frustrating situations. By remaining in character, they impart discreet messages to young readers on their level, and they subtly prod adults to recognition of the childish qualities that we all retain. Without preaching, a moral value is presented in humorous vein for our contemplation. What we choose to do with it remains a matter of our own conscience.

Recognizing our own pomposities is another effective method used by the comic strip. With skillful artistry, Charles Schulz points out human weaknesses that we all possess to some degree. By poking a hole in the veil of dignity we draw over our shortcomings, he forces us to a re-evaluation of our personalities. By demonstrating that our pomposities and selfishnesses are common throughout the human race, "Peanuts" gives us the courage to confront our failings.

The gift of "Peanuts" is threefold. The first gift is in its understated humor. By subtly making its point, the lesson is brought home in an inoffensive manner that promotes high acceptance in the reader. If we are forcefully presented with a fact of personal shortcoming, resentment will narrow the chances of altering our behavior. If we are skillfully led to a conclusion of our own making, chances are greater for a cheerful and successful alteration of our behavior.

The second gift of "Peanuts", observation, is an added blessing when we apply its lesson to our lives. Wry humor in presenting human nature enables us to view fellow humans with a less critical eye in our own relationships. If we understand a person's

reaction from what we observe him to be, we are better suited to accept his response to us in that particular context.

The third gift of "Peanuts" perhaps should be the most valued. By illustrating humorously that each person is an individual and each of us possesses shortcomings and failings, Charles Schulz points out that we are all alike beneath our physical differences. The brotherhood of man is not a philosophical theory; it is a real concept that can change our attitudes and enrich our lives.

Humor in comic strips is more than just a general provocation of the senses. It also contributes a meaningful insight into our lives.

—SUSAN E. HOWARD

Second Prize Winner

TOPPING OFF BLAST FURNACE #13

Putting the final structural member into a superstructure is always a celebration among fellow ironworkers.

I was an apprentice at the time when the opportunity of topping off #13 blast furnace at United States Steel was given to me. As I put on my work belt, consisting of two structural offset open-end wrenches, a bolt bag, and a connecting bar, my pusher, or foreman, was informing the gang of the importance of being safe in this final lift and the procedure to be taken. As we filed out of the mobile office building, known as the shanty, I grabbed six bolts, nuts and washers, and put them into my bolt bag. I didn't want to overload myself for the climb or to chance having anything fall from my bolt bag since there would be workmen below me.

While walking towards the blast furnace, which some would describe as a large pot belly stove large enough to engulf an entire football field, I looked up to where I would soon be and had a sudden feeling of insecurity. My hands became clammy beneath my work gloves, and the butterflies in my stomach had fallen out of formation. I began talking to my partner Butch, who was walking a few feet in front of me, in an attempt to relieve some of the nervousness which had overcome me. Butch, an experienced and intelligent ironworker, began telling me how we were to connect the final section. We continued to discuss our plan of attack in the elevator, but as we ascended, I felt as if I had left my stomach on the ground. The elevator took us as high as the 173-foot elevation, known as the working platform.

We checked ourselves out and began climbing up the network of iron, which had not yet been detailed to its finished stage. The handrail was missing, and only half the stairsteps had been erected. The decking was missing from the "C" shaped iron known as the channels. The channels formed the outline of the platforms and walkways, making it necessary for us to step on each channel, as if walking on a set of railroad tracks three feet apart, putting one foot on each rail. Instead of railroad ties and rocks beneath us, there was approximately 200 feet of air.

We reached the 270-foot elevation and paused for a moment on a twelve-inch-wide beam. I took a deep breath and looked around. I could see that the final piece was hooked up to the derrick and ready to be lifted into position. The men working on the ground looked like a colony of ants. Seeing them and realizing how high up I was made my stomach feel as if it were stuffed with jelly and being gently massaged. Butch and I separated, and like two mountain climbers scaling two different faces of a canyon wall, we ascended. A technique is employed in climbing a column. These particular columns were 45 feet high, and if you were looking at them from the top down, they would form the letter "H". The vertical lines of the "H" are known as the flanges, and the horizontal line is known as the web. Climbing is accomplished by putting one hand on each side of one flange while putting the feet around the flange on either side of the web and against the opposite flange. In this hunched position, I must have appeared to be an inch worm crawling up a flower stalk. After struggling the first 20 feet, I stopped to rest on an intermediate beam. I saw that Butch had already reached his destination. My legs were becoming weak and rubbery, more from fright than from being tired. I got back into my

hunched position on the column and mustered all the strength and determination I had to reach my peak. Throwing one leg over the top, I straddled the web like riding a horse. From my vantage point, I could see familiar landmarks 25 miles away.

As the final section started its journey upward, all the workmen below looked up. I felt as if I were on a celestial stage. The final section was donned with a Christmas tree and the stars and stripes, a traditional gesture of patriotism in the construction trades. As the section swung into position, I grabbed the safety line and untied it from one of the bolt holes. Putting the pointed end of my connecting bar partially into the first hole of the column, and leaving enough room for the section to lower between Butch's column and mine, I signalled the derrick to lower the section. Like a bullet, I rammed the connecting bar through to catch the hole on the new section. At the same time, I signalled the derrick to stop. I placed six bolts in the thirty-bolt connection to make it safe. Getting up and standing on top of the new piece, I freed it from the derrick. I looked down and saw that everyone was still looking up. I reached for the flag and folded it, with a fantastic feeling of accomplishment. My butterflies were back in formation, and I was literally on top of the world. In total ecstasy, I took a bow to the colony of ants beneath me.

—DANIEL J. BAZIN, JR.

Third Prize Winner

ERNIE

Although twenty-eight years have passed since my birth, my identity to life has been as closely related as the second hand to the minute. Both involved the most important person in my life, my mother, Ernesta; we called her Ernie. She brought me into this world with the sensitivity and kindness of an easy-going Italian woman who loved everyone. I could go to her for any problem, knowing I would be satisfied by her sincerity and love. I loved my mother very much, but I never told her.

On a cold May night in 1978, I received a call from my brother-in-law, John, informing me that Ernie had passed out and was being taken to the hospital.

I arrived at the hospital at the same time as the ambulance. They took my mother into the Emergency Room. I never liked this place; it always projected a morbid feeling. I sat in the waiting room while my sister, Kathy, went in with Mom. John arrived and sat beside me. Ernie had always looked upon John as her own son whom she loved as much as any of her children.

Kathy entered the room and said I could go in to see Ernie. I walked into the room with the biggest forced smile I could crack. Seeing her in this totally unfamiliar setting made it hard for me not to cry. She had every gadget in the room connected to her like a giant spider web. I got close to her head and kept my smile. I asked if she wanted her oil checked while pretending I was washing her windows. I got no response facially, but could sense a feeling of satisfaction although she was in pain.

The test results showed that her sugar count was eight times higher than normal, and she lacked potassium in her blood. She was admitted to Intensive Care.

I arrived home from work on May 19, 1978; Ernie had been in the hospital for five days. My wife, Christine, met me at the door with tears in her eyes. She painfully told me that the testing showed that Ernie had terminal cancer. The news weakened me; I could feel the tears coming, but instead I got into the shower to hide the tears from Christine.

I entered Ernie's room that night with my forced smile. She was eating the typical bland hospital food. I reached for a cracker, and she stabbed me with her fork. I knew she wasn't feeling any better, but it was her way of breaking the ice. Kathy and my elder sister, Mary Jean, sat red-eyed in their chairs. Kathy began to speak, but couldn't; Mary Jean picked it right up and began to talk. She told me what I had already known just to assure Ernie that I knew. Ernie stayed in the hospital until May 27, 1978.

We planned a large Memorial Day celebration for her, but she never saw it. On Memorial Day morning Kathy found Ernie in a coma. The doctor told us she had suffered a stroke and that her chances for living until the next day were 1,000 to 1. Ernie's love of

life and her love for her family kept her alive for 27 more days. We maintained a vigil at her bedside throughout this period. I felt close to her during our final days together. I talked to her frequently, hoping for a response. Coming to the realization that Ernie was dying crippled me mentally. Death remained in the tributaries of my mind; I could not find a reasonable explanation which would help me flow back into the main stream. It was Ernie who built a dam to unite her thoughts in one vast reservoir leading to the main stream. Ernie made me understand the meaning of living through her death. She made me understand the never-ending responsibilities and challenges of life.

On June 27, 1978, Kathy, Mary Jean and I were all at her side when Ernie died at age 55.

Ernie gave life to everyone around her. She inspired me in everything I did, and I never took the time to tell her that I loved her. I visited Ernie's grave site three weeks after her burial. On my knees I cried, clutching the dirt, trying to find some way to communicate, to say, "Mother, I love you." Ernie's death brought reality into my life. She gave me identity at birth and at her death. I love you, Mom.

—DANIEL J. BAZIN, JR.

OPEN CONTEST - 1979 First Prize Winner

AT THE HANDS OF LOVE

"When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things" (I. Cor. 13:11).

The whims and fancies of immaturity, when faced with the challenges of a savage, deadly world, can offer no security for man; he must either benefit from his newfound wisdom and maturity and emerge triumphantly as a stronger person, or he must fall by the wayside in defeat. The challenge of love, albeit spiritual love, the love between man and woman, or the love of man for his fellow man and his country, is such that no man can remain untouched and unchanged by it. The pathos surrounding an individual confronting the challenge of love, the resultant loss of innocence, and the subsequent maturation, all draw the lover to his moment of truth, to his final victory or defeat. To be victorious in love is to attain all that is meaningful and pure and exalted in life's offerings and opportunities. To be defeated by love is to drink the bitter dregs of lost virtue and self-destruction.

The victory in Beowulf's¹ life is the legacy that he leaves to his people. Despite his distinguished lineage and noble bearing and conduct, the young Beowulf has faith only in his own physical prowess. Left in this state, his promise of greatness would remain unfulfilled. Hrothgar, however, recognizes Beowulf's potential and attempts to temper his pride by wise counsel in the parable of Heremod:

Have no care for pride, great warrior. Now for a time there is glory in your might: yet soon it shall be that sickness or sword will diminish your strength, or fire's fangs, or flood's surge, or sword's swing, or spear's flight, or appalling age; brightness of eyes will fail and grow dark; then it shall be that death will overcome you, warrior (p. 31).

Hrothgar's advice serves Beowulf well enough through the years of his steady ascension to the throne as he matures in love of honor and love for his country: "Thus Beowulf showed himself brave, a man known in battles, of good deeds, bore himself according to discretion" (p. 38).

The promise of greatness is fulfilled; Beowulf is victorious, even unto death. Beowulf's triumph is the honor and love of his fellow countrymen; the fruit of his victory is the promise of Wiglaf. The standards that Beowulf has kept have accomplished the most valuable gift he can give: the torch is passed to one who is worthy to carry it.

The victory of Hrafnkel² presents a studied contrast to the victory of Beowulf. Beowulf's victory is in his death to self and his love for others. Hrafnkel's victory is in the defeat of a self-serving love and the discovery of his inner strength.

Hrafnkel's love for the god Frey leads him to the brink of self-destruction when it initiates a chain of events that reveals the impotency of that love. The catalysts are the stallion Freyfaxi and Hrafnkel's vow to kill anyone who rides the horse. That he has the freedom to choose whether to fulfill that vow never occurs to Hrafnkel until the deed has been committed. Hitherto supremely and blindly confident in his rightness and in the benevolent approval of the gods, the slaying of Einar brings him abruptly to the realization of his entrapment. The killing greatly sobers him; for the first time he wavers in his own arrogance and offers to right what he belatedly feels to have been "one of the worst acts [he has] ever committed" (p. 43). The significance of his sudden perception is clearly revealed in his rueful comment to Thorbjorn: "How often we regret saying too much, and how seldom saying too little!" (p. 43).

His generous offer of recompense is too late. The offer is rejected, and the trap is fully sprung. Hrafnkel is doomed by the treachery of his love. Disillusionment comes swiftly, totally, and justifiably: Hrafnkel suffers humiliation at the hands of those he has wronged, and their revenge is complete when he is stripped of his material wealth and thusly of his power over his people.

From the wreckage of his life, Hrafnkel finds his victory. The loss of his love forces him to rely upon his own strength and abilities:

Hrafnkel lived the first year there in great hardship, but he improved his resources by sending his men fishing. Hrafnkel himself worked very hard while he was building the house. He raised every calf and kid the first year, and he was so successful with his livestock that hardly any of his beasts failed; in fact, they were so productive they gave him almost double the normal yield (pp. 59-60).

The death of his love finally and fully frees him:

Hrafnkel heard what the Thjostarssons had done, the killing of his Freyfaxi and the burning of the gods and the temple in Hrafnkelsdale.

Then Hrafnkel said, "I think it's a vain thing to believe in the gods." He declared he wouldn't worship them any longer, and he kept his vow, for he never held any sacrifices again (p. 61).

Hrafnkel soon regains his wealth and his power, but now they are built on a solid foundation that ensures his victory. He knows that his true strength comes from within, not from blind love and allegiance to an impotent force.

The love of Mark for Tristan in "Tristan and Isolt"³ is the strand that irrevocably entangles the destinies of three lives. Because of the jealousy of his people, Mark fears for the safety of his nephew and allows himself to be allied in marriage to Isolt. There, but for the interference of others, the story might have ended. Tragedy intervenes, however, in the form of human enterprises: first in the well-intentioned gesture of Queen Isolt in preparing the fatal love potion; again in the maliciousness of Marjodo and Melot; and finally in the resentment of Isolt of the White Hand.

Perhaps, despite the disruptive forces surrounding Mark, Tristan and Isolt, the outcome of the tragic love affair could have been altered had it not been for the complexity of Mark's love for Isolt. Although the marriage is a political one and thus born of expediency, Mark loves Isolt, and whether that love is a genuine romantic love, a love born of pride in her as his possession, or a love born of the challenge he senses in Tristan, is immaterial. His love becomes a self-deception when he knows that Isolt's heart and soul are given to Tristan, and yet he refuses to accept it:

"To whom then shall the shame or his dishonor be given? For in truth 'twere wrong to say that Tristan and Isolt deceived him; he saw with his eyes, and knew, unseeing, that she loved him not; and yet he loved her!" (p. 217).

And yet the deception does not lessen Mark's victory, but instead emphasizes the quality and depth of his love. Upon learning of the deaths of Tristan and Isolt, Mark grieves, "Alas! Tristan, hadst thou but trusted in me, and told me all the truth, then had I given Isolt to thee for wife (p. 232). The turbulence of his emotional stress reveals the true measure of his honor and loyalty. He loved them both and would have denied his love to keep them both.

Nor do Tristan and Isolt taste defeat in their ill-fated liaison, for theirs is an encompassing love that permits the temporary creation of their own perfect world in the Love Grotto:

They had a court, they had a council, which brought them nought but joy. Their courtiers were the green trees, the shade and the sunlight, the streamlet and the spring; flowers, grass, leaf and blossom, which refreshed their eyes. Their service was the song of birds, the little brown nightingales, the throstles, and the merles, and other wood birds . . . What might they ask better? The man was with the woman and the woman with the man, they had the fellowship they most desired, and were where they fain would be (p. 211).

The richness, the completeness, of their love, so briefly savored, seals their fate. What one cannot have, the other will deny; where one must be, the other will be found. There is only one resolution to their dilemma, and they find in death the togetherness that was denied them in life:

"And by the tomb of Tristan [Mark] bade them plant a rose tree, and by that of Isolt a vine, and the two reached toward each other across the chapel, and wove branches and root so closely together that no man hereafter might separate them" (p. 232).

The young Perceval⁴, like the young Beowulf, has faith only in his physical prowess; but here the similarity ends. Beowulf's life is a victory of honor over self; Perceval's heedlessness plunges him headlong into defeat when his failure to comprehend the essence of God's love results in his loss of the Kingdom of God. His impetuous, unsophisticated nature forgets the loving guidance of his mother before he has ridden out of her sight, and his first step on the path to self-destruction is taken.

The foreshadowing of Perceval's fate is clearly evident when, through ignorance, he fails to inquire about the curious procession that precedes each course of the meal at the Fisher King's castle. The next morning, he wanders in bewilderment through the empty buildings. The household is deserted; doors of rooms that had been open to him the evening before are closed; there is no reply to his call; his horse is saddled and waiting with his lance and shield in the courtyard; the drawbridge is shut against him. The generosity is gone; there can be no return.

The maiden in the forest offers another occasion to attain the wisdom and maturity that Perceval is so sorely lacking, but he cannot yet grasp the implication of the fate awaiting him and instead elects to continue his aimless search for adventure.

The sternest of cautionings against the waywardness of his chosen path is delivered by the Loathly Lady, who bitterly denounces his conduct:

“Ah, Perceval, Fortune is bald behind, but has a forelock in front. A curse on him who greets or wishes you well, for you did not seize Fortune when you met her. You entered the dwelling of the Fisher King; you saw the lance which bleeds. Was it so painful to open your mouth that you could not ask why the drop of blood sprang from the white point of the lance? When you saw the grail, you did not inquire who was the rich man served with it . . . It was you, unfortunate man, who saw that the time and the place were right for speech, and yet remained mute. You had ample opportunity, but in an evil hour you kept silent” (pp. 80-81).

At last Perceval becomes aware of the essence of his error, but still the full magnitude of his defeat is hidden from him. For five years he wanders lost in sin, searching for he knows not what, until the emptiness of his life catches him up and he must find peace. The smothering cloak of his immaturity is rent by the Holy Hermit, who thus reveals the enormity of his failing. Four opportunities have been granted Perceval to secure the love and knowledge so freely offered by God; four opportunities have been carelessly rejected. God's patience is not boundless; He grants to each man only a limited number of occasions to avail himself of His love, and the door is closed. The finality of the hermit's message is tempered with a ray of hope; perhaps yet another opportunity awaits. Perceval will spend the rest of his life searching for the Holy Grail; perhaps he “can still advance in worth and enjoy both honor and paradise” (p. 86).

The measure of the man may be found in his victory as well as his defeat, and so it is with Sir Gawain.⁵

Only love of honor forces Gawain to leave the security of Camelot to face almost certain death at the hands of the Green Knight. Everything appears against him: the bitter emptiness of the season, the fellness of the Green Knight himself, and the hopeless search for the Green Chapel. In sharp contrast to the desolateness of his immediate present and future is offered the castle upon which he happens Christmas Eve. Gawain once again is amid a secure haven peopled with who ironically appear to be generous, warm, gentle souls. To reject what must have appeared to be the last opportunity to avail himself of the security of human society magnifies the strength of the man. His gentle refusal of the lovely lady's blandishments further demonstrates his honor and virtue. A lesser man, overcome by the burden resting upon his shoulders, would have grasped the opportunity so sweetly offered as a drowning man might grasp at a straw. Gawain succeeds in the standards he has established for himself; his virtue remains intact when he overcomes the temptation placed in his path and proves his conduct loyal.

The sting of defeat comes for Gawain not from the test of virtue, but from the dread that fills him when he contemplates the impending doom awaiting him. In a moment of weakness, he accepts the gift the lady presses on him:

“Now are you refusing this silk,” said she, “because it seems so cheap a gift? It seems so, I know, a small thing and of little value. But if a man knew the powers that are knit into its fabric, he might hold it at a higher rate. Any man that is girt with this green girdle, when it is close clasped around him, there is no man under heaven that can cut him down, and he cannot be slain by any skill on earth” (p. 372).

That the small temptation proves his downfall is a stunning blow to Gawain when he is confronted with his duplicity by Bercilak:

“For it is my own green girdle you are wearing, and it was my own wife that gave it you. I know all about your kisses, and the love-making of my wife, and how you

bore yourself, for it was I myself that brought it about. I sent her to make trial of you, and surely I think that you are the most faultless knight that ever trod upon earth.... But just over the girdle, sir, you failed a little, and came short in your loyalty; yet that was not for any intrigue nor for love-making, but just that you loved your life, and I do not blame you for it" (pp. 384-385).

Gawain is shamed and grieved at his failing; for him, it is a humiliating defeat and one which he cannot let himself forget:

"... this is the band that is sign of my fault, my disgrace, the mark of the cowardice and the covetousness that I yielded to, the token of my broken troth. And I must needs wear it as long as I live. For no man can hide his scar, nor rid himself of it; when once it is fastened upon him, it will never depart" (p.388).

In his defeat is the essence of his victory. His love of honor proves ennobling and enriching; he is the better man for it.

"The Death of King Arthur"^a is a portrait of human frailty and fallibility. The defeats in the lives of Arthur, Lancelot, and Guinevere distinctly parallel the divided loyalties that cause the fall of the Round Table and succinctly display the reasons why the Round Table could not succeed. Arthur's ambivalence toward the love between Lancelot and Guinevere, his failure to properly wield the authority vested in him as leader of his people, and his lack of faith in himself, all provide fertile breeding grounds for the seeds of discontent and divided loyalties already sown among the fellowship of the Round Table. The noble experiment fails precisely as Arthur, Lancelot and Guinevere fail; man cannot adhere to the demands of conflicting loves.

To Arthur is dealt the bitter disillusionment of a man who clearly perceives the shifting sands upon which the foundations of his life's achievements have been erected, at a moment in time too late to reinforce the crumbling base. Like Mark, Arthur shields his realization of the love between Lancelot and Guinevere behind a mask of self-deception. Unlike Mark, Arthur's moment of truth sees not a victory in the measure of the worth of the man, but only the destruction of the unlikely ideals to which he is committed. His irresolution is kept overlong; its fruition is the total loss of a life of honor, nobleness, and humanitarianism. In a moment of sheer poignancy, Arthur stands alone on the battlefield at Salisbury, utterly bereft of all those he had loved and trusted, and realizes the impossibility of the goals of the Round Table. He is, after all, only mortal, and so, subject to the failings of mortal flesh. His heedlessness in allowing his course of action to be influenced by Gawain and others, his imperfections, his unfounded confidence in the innate goodness of mankind, have all led him to the collapse of his dreams. If he as architect cannot reach the unattainable, how can lesser men?

Nor is there any charity in the fate imposed upon Lancelot and Guinevere. They are the precipitating factor that sunders the Round Table, and there can be no escape from that reality. Guinevere seeks penance through her rejection of Lancelot's love and worldly pleasures:

"Through this same man and me hath all this war be wrought, and the death of the most noblest knights of the world; for through our love that we have loved together is my most noble lord slain . . . And therefore, Sir Lancelot, I require thee and beseech thee heartily, for all the love that was ever betwixt us, that thou never see me no more in the visage. And I command thee, on God's behalf, that thou forsake my company. And to thy kingdom look thou turn again, and keep well thy realm from war and wrack; for as well as I have loved thee

heretofore, mine heart will not serve now to see thee; for through thee and me is the flower of kings and knights destroyed" (pp. 218-219).

Lancelot is left the full burden: he knew well the ultimate cost of his love for Guinevere, and he was powerless to change it. He has suffered the larger loss: loss of honor, loss of love, and loss of virtue.

Life without love is meaningless; love without growth is hopeless. It is not enough to be merely the beloved or the lover; the challenge of love requires that each person shed those "childish things" that would inhibit the full potential of its gift. Whether love raises one to the lofty heights of personal fulfillment, or leaves one in the bitter ashes of defeat, depends upon the capability of the lover to comprehend what is being asked of him, and to relinquish that cost without reluctance.

NOTES

¹*Beowulf*, ed. Joseph F. Tuso, trans. E. Talbot Donaldson (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1975). For convenience, future references will be made to this edition and included in parentheses in the text.

²"Hrafnkel's Saga," in *Hrafnkel's Saga and Other Stories*, ed. Betty Radice, trans. Hermann Palsson (Great Britain: The Chaucer Press, 1971), pp. 35-71. For convenience, future references will be made to this edition and included in parentheses in the text.

³Gottfried von Strassburg, "Tristan and Isolt," in *Medieval Romances*, ed. Roger Sherman Loomis, et al. (New York: Random House, Inc., 1957), pp. 88-232. For convenience, future references will be made to this edition and included in parentheses in the text.

⁴Chrétien de Troyes, "Perceval, or the Story of the Grail," in *Medieval Romances*, ed. Roger Sherman Loomis, et al. (New York: Random House, Inc., 1957), pp. 3-87. For convenience, future references will be made to this edition and included in parentheses in the text.

⁵"Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," in *Medieval Romances*, ed. Roger Sherman Loomis, et al. (New York: Random House, Inc., 1957), pp. 324-389. For convenience, future references will be made to this edition, and included in parentheses in the text.

⁶Sir Thomas Malory, "The Death of King Arthur" in *King Arthur and His Knights*, ed. Eugene Vinaver (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 157-226. For convenience, future references will be made to this edition and included in parentheses in the text.

—SUSAN E. HOWARD

Second Prize Winner

THE MYTHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF MILTON'S *PARADISE LOST*

Throughout the Middle Ages, men generally shared the opinion that mankind was incapable of improving life on earth through intellectual discovery and intellectual achievement. They subscribed to Catholic Church doctrine, and they adhered to the concept of passively accepting the hardships of mortal existence. The Church was truly universal at this time, and under its auspices men were taught to prepare for the afterlife and the City of God. The original sin had doomed life on earth to be nothing less than a rigorous religious training ground. The pleasures of the flesh and intellectual advancement were concepts synonymous with the devil himself; spiritual rearing and spiritual growth were the primary concerns of medieval Europe.

The sullen perceptions, especially those in regard to the insignificance of temporal affairs, began to slowly disintegrate as the light of the Renaissance spread its potent rays over the European continent. Men began to question the infallibility of the Catholic Church and a more direct, less hierarchical faith was inspired. Slowly, the Church lost its stranglehold on ideas and on the exclusive transmission of educational values. Secular educational institutions evolved and men discovered truths not necessarily reflected by the Bible.

Beneath this superstructure of learning and discovery, strong crossbeams of humanism were being hewn. Philosophical thinkers such as Erasmus and Thomas Moore advocated the belief that man could and should be more than the decorative centerpiece of the universe, man was a rational being capable of bettering his condition through creative thinking. These humanists nimbly turned to the ancient cultures of

Greece and Rome to support their humanist creed. They pointed out that these pagan societies, although decadent in many respects, had developed noble works, particularly in the areas of law, art, political science, architecture, philosophy and literature.

It was not unusual, therefore, that European scholars began to imitate Greco-Roman works and to add their own innovations to them. But reconciliation of pagan classical works with Christian values was not as easy to accomplish as it might seem. Greco-Roman societies were pre-Christian and any improperly handled imitation of classical forms was certain to stir the wrath of the Catholic Church and of the Christian populace in general.

The vexing problem of reconciling Christian beliefs with pagan ideals was left in the hands of a group called the Christian Humanists. One of the more illustrious members of this sect was the Puritan poet John Milton. His epic work, *Paradise Lost*, is a resplendent example of the synthesis of classical ideas with Christian teachings. Milton took the story of creation and of man's fall and rewrote it in the classical epic genre. More daring than this was Milton's use of mythological references and invocations throughout the poem. Mythology was ancient man's attempt to explain creation and natural phenomenon; hence, mythology was primitive, quasi-religion that was in direct conflict with Christian theology.

Why, then did Milton employ these mythological references in his Christian epic? Were they merely a display of pedantry, meant to impress the reader? One obvious and simple reason for their use is that the classical epic genre requires numerous mythological invocations and allusions. Milton, however, employs mythology in two other significant ways. First, he uses mythological concepts as analogous literary tools; in many cases, similes are employed to better illuminate Biblical characters and events. Second, mythological places and characters are incorporated into the plot itself. This incorporation enlivens and enriches the poem, but it can also lead to serious consequences, perhaps to the point of detracting from the biblical account of creation and of God. Let us take a more detailed look at Milton's use of mythological references in *Paradise Lost*, for his skillful combination of Christian theology and pagan mythology represents the larger, overall struggle of Christian Humanists to reconcile classical values with those of Christianity.

Mythological references abound throughout *Paradise Lost*. One chief function of these references is to serve as similes and thereby refine the poem through descriptive comparisons and analogies. These similes are either explicitly stated or implied. One good example of an explicit simile can be found in Book I. In this passage, Milton describes Satan as one:

... in bulk as large
as whom the fables name of monstrous size,
Titanian or Earth-born ...

(11. 196-198)

He uses the adjective Titanian to describe Satan's size, the Titans having been mythological gods of enormous size and incredible strength. This descriptive passage aids Milton in portraying Satan as a huge and powerful force. This simile also acts on a more subtle level: the Titans were defeated by Jove in a battle for the heavens. Milton indirectly suggests to us that Satan too will be subject to ultimate defeat by a superior force.

Another example of mythological comparisons can be found in Book II. Satan had just misled his legions into believing that their only recourse was to corrupt God's new creation, a being called man. Satan left to do the deed, and the devils entertained themselves until their "great chief returned," (Book II 1.527). One such amusement was to fall:

... with vast Tyghonean rage ...
and ride the air in whirlwind ...

(Book II 11. 539-541)

The devils are compared to the terrible Titan Typhon, who was:

A terrible monster with a hundred heads
who rose up against all the Gods.¹

Typhon was one of the last of the Titans, and Milton again involks this Titan imagery to describe the debasement of the fallen angels.

Some of the most interesting analogies are those drawn to describe Eve. Milton compares her to several mythological characters, one of them being the infamous Pandora:

. . . the genial Angel to our Sire
Brought her in naked beauty more adorn'd
More lovely than Pandora, whom the Gods
Endowed with all their gifts . . .

(Book LV 11. 713-715)

Pandora (which means “gift to all”) was Zeus’s revenge upon man for having accepted fire from Promethens. The Greeks believed that Pandora (like Eve) was the first woman, and she was considered by the Greeks to be the source of all mankind’s woes. Milton implies that Eve, like Pandora, will “ensnare mankind with her faire looks” (Book IV 11. 717-718) and with her relentless curiosity.

Another comparison concerning Eve is made in Book IX. Just before Eve is tempted by the serpent, Milton compares her with the Greek goddess Artemis (Delia). Artemis was the virgin huntress goddess who was associated with the moon and the newly born. She was the personification of the lunar cycle, and this association made her the representative of light and darkness, or more precisely, the uncertainty between good and evil. Similarly Eve is the representative link between innocence (good) and fallen virtue (evil). Also, Eve is the mother of mankind, and she is, in a figurative sense, the protector of the newly born.

Not all of Milton’s mythological analogies are explicitly stated. An excellent example of an implicit mythological comparison is found in Book II, 11. 750-758. Sin is portrayed as springing full grown out of Satan’s head, and this correlates to the mythical story of Athena’s birth from the head of Zeus. Athena was the favorite child of Zeus, and she was the goddess of agriculture and of handicrafts. Although the Satan-Sin, Zeus-Athena relationship is not explicitly mentioned, it is not hard to discern it and to appreciate Milton’s use of this mythological concept.

Another implicit mythological comparison centers on Eve. She is implicitly compared to Narcissus, the fair lad who fell in love with his reflection when he looked into a pond of water. Milton portrays Eve in this vain, egotistical light when she first views her reflection from the surface of a pond:

As I bend down to look, just
Opposite, a shape within the watery gleam appeared
Bending to look on me, I started back
It started back, but pleased I soon returned,
Please’d it returned as soon with answering looks of
sympathy and love . . .
. . . there I had
Mine eyes . . . and pin’d with fixt vain desire.

(Book IV, 11. 460-466)

An angelic voice disrupts Eve’s infatuation, however, and the Narcissian analogy abruptly ends.

Important as mythological references are for comparative purposes, they also serve another function: Milton incorporates them into the story as actual characters of places. The Greek concept of Chaos is a good example of this type of assimilation. Mythological stories tell us that Chaos was the unsettled, churning force which produced three children — Night, Death and Love. From the latter sprang light, order, earth and

the Gods. In his epic, Milton personifies Chaos and sets his domain between hell and earth. Milton nowhere suggests that Chaos created heaven, earth or God; rather, he states that Chaos does exist and is still a mass of disorder and confusion, but it was created by an act of divine will and is under God's supervision.

Another mythological feature borrowed by Milton for his epic is the river Styx. This river is located in Hell, and it nicely serves Milton's purpose. The Greeks believed that the river Styx was a river of hate which flowed through the underworld (Hades). It is by no means unusual that Milton incorporated the river to be "the flood of deadly hate" (Book II, 1. 577) in the Christian underworld.

Milton included two mythological figures in his work. The first character was the Gorgon terror known as Medusa. This creature was indeed gruesome, for her hair was composed of serpents and anyone who looked upon her was turned into stone. Milton stations the Medusa in Hell, an eerie sentinel who guards the Styx river against devilish trespassers. The psychological effect of having this creature in Hell is truly superb, for it heightens the reader's horror of Satan's kingdom.

The other character assimilated from mythology and found in *Paradise Lost* is Mulciber, better known to the Greeks as Hephaestus. In mythological stories, Hephaestus was portrayed as the lame and ugly god of fire and of the forge. He was also the patron of handicrafts. Hephaestus was a well liked god and Milton was uneasy about putting a highly regarded deity in the Christian Hell. He therefore changed the name Hephaestus to Mulciber, but he retained the character's architectural and constructual abilities; in *Paradise Lost*, Mulciber is the craftsman of Hell, and he builds the palace Pandemonium for Satan.

An interesting problem arises in regard to the inclusion of Mulciber in the poem. The following passage from Book I indicates the exact nature of this dilemma:

... (Mulciber was) thrown by angry Jove
Sheer o'er the crystal battlements; from morn to noon he
fell, from noon to dewy eve,
... Drop't from the zenith like a falling star.
(11. 741-745)

This passage seems to explain how Mulciber ended in Hell. If Mulciber, however, ended in Hell by being thrown out by Jove, then it follows that other Greek deities also exist, particularly Zeus himself. This vexing problem was resolved by Milton a few lines later. He wrote:

... Thus they relate
erring; for he (Mulciber) with this rebellious rout
Fell long before; nor aught availed him
To have built in Heaven high towers; nor did he 'scape
By all his engines, but was headlong sent,
With his industrious crew, to build in Hell.
(11. 746-751)

Milton points out that Mulciber did fall but when the rest of the discredited angels fell. The mythological story of Mulciber's fall is only a misinformed pagan tale; Mulciber was essentially a devil in disguise, and that is why the pre-Christian Greeks thought of him as a god. Almighty God, not Jove, was responsible for Mulciber's fall.

The mythological references interspersed throughout *Paradise Lost* add high degree of descriptiveness to the poem. The epic similies employed draw excellent parallels between Greek mythological figures and Biblical characters. Milton also incorporates mythological figures and mythological places into the plot itself; this can be a dangerous literary feat, for the inclusion of mythological characters in a Christian story can add credence to the mythological concepts and detract from the veracity of Christian theology. Milton reconciles these two sets of beliefs, not by denouncing mythological characters but, paradoxically, by admitting their existence. Milton realized that pre-Christian men had had no spiritual guidance and had consequently

developed their own corrupt religion. The gods they worshipped were actually Satan's cohorts (i.e., Mulciber, Moloch, etc.) because ancient man had been deceived by that wily prince.

With this understanding established between Milton and the reader, Milton can freely refer to mythological tales throughout his Christian work without being branded sacreligious. His efforts towards reconciling pagan beliefs with Christian values was representative of the larger struggle of Christian Humanists all over Europe. That Milton was able to successfully accomplish this reconciliation in *Paradise Lost* was a task worthy of Zeus himself.

NOTE

¹Edith Hamilton, *Mythology* (New York: New American Library, 1969).

—MICHAEL MARRIOTT

Third Prize Winner

DO NOT GO GENTLE INTO THAT GOOD NIGHT

*Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

*Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.*

*Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

*Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way
Do not go gentle into that good night.*

*Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

*And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

Dylan Thomas

A *villanelle* is a French verse form derived from Italian folk songs of the late fifteenth century. It is usually employed for pastoral subjects or to express quiet, melancholic feelings. To find a man urging his father to rave and rage at the approach of death in a *villanelle* is most surprising and, as a result of this surprise, most effective. In this poem, Dylan Thomas gives the form a dignity and seriousness not usually found in the *villanelle*. He utilizes the repetition that is part of the form to emphasize his point and to make an emotion-filled statement that stuns the reader with its impact.

The speaker is a son exhorting his father not to die easily and peacefully. He is audacious in this, suggesting his father face death unwillingly, screaming like a madman. The audacity is actually directed at death itself. His father is a man who has never expressed any bitterness in his life, even though he felt it. He has always been gentle. His son does not want him to die without one last attempt at showing his emotions. He

says old people should not be willing to die just because they are old. They should cling to life as resolutely as any young person, facing death angrily instead of passively.

The son is a man with compassion for those people who fail in life and don't realize they have failed until it is too late for them to do anything about it. After he first tells his father that he should rage against dying, he goes on to talk about other men who fight death. He says that philosophers who expressed their wisdom but failed to inspire or convince people of its worth do not die easily. Men who were good, who devoted their lives to prayer, do not die peacefully. They shout their prayers were ineffectual because they helped no one. If they had taken action, performed deeds of goodness for people who were receptive to them, their lives would have been worth something. Poets who attempted to glorify and praise beauty to the world yet were unable to write successfully or reach anyone who understood them do not die willingly. Sober men, who believed others were blind to the problems of the world, foolish and silly in their happiness, realizing that they have lived half-lives and missed much joy, do not die contentedly. The son then speaks directly to his father, almost dead, on that plane between life and death, asking him to respond with a violence of emotion never before expressed. The son wants his father to rail against death, to grasp at the last moments of life. He prays for his father to die in a most un-Christian way, fighting the coming of the final darkness, struggling against the quietness of restful death.

The development of the idea and of the imagery in this poem is largely dependent on the form chosen by the poet. A *villanelle* is composed of five tercets rhyming *aba*, followed by a quatrain rhyming *abaa*. The first line of the initial tercet serves as the last line of the second and fourth tercets and the third line of the initial tercet serves as the last line of the third and fifth tercets. These two refrain lines follow each other to constitute the last two lines of the closing quatrain. This repetition can be very restrictive and turn the poem into an exercise in the facile use of words without creating any worthwhile verse. Thomas is able to avoid this problem and make the form work for him, not against him.

Imagery involving light and dark, day and night dominates the poem. The "night" of the first line is opposed to the "day" and "light" of the second and third lines. A man's life ends and he goes into the darkness of death. It is both a literal darkness, as he is buried in the grave, and a darkening of the mind. He will no longer be conscious, aware of the world around him. His "day" of life is over. His "light" is dying. Light symbolizes knowledge and creation. It seems to be eternal. Although it vanishes for a while when the sun sets, it returns in the morning. The light that is a man's life does not return after it dies. There are words that connote light throughout the poem: "blaze," "burn," "bright," "lightning," "sun." Sight is contrasted with blindness of two kinds. Some men can see with their eyes but are blind to joy. Others, though sightless, can see much beauty. The images of "night," "dark," and the "dying of the light" cast a pall over the other images. The contrast between the images gives the poem an aura of brilliance about to be vanquished by an unconquerable doom.

"Old age" is a metonymy for all old people. It is personified, told to rave with anger and burn with passion, to protest death. Metaphors are used to describe words and deeds. The deeds are like the men who performed them. They are "frail" but would have "danced" if they had only been given the opportunity. There are images of physical action. The poets "caught and sang the sun in flight." These words indicate movement and life, joyous action that is stilled by death.

The title of the poem contains an ironic pun. "Good-night" is the customary farewell phrase used when one goes home in the evening or goes to bed. Death is often referred to as a long sleep. The sleep of death permits no awakening to the light of a new day. Perhaps it is a good night, providing final calm and peace. But if a person is not aware of that peace, then what is it worth? It is better to cling to life and fight for a few extra moments of consciousness and light than to surrender to the dark without question.

The speaker asks his father to both curse and bless him, a paradoxical action. Perhaps he is only seeking some reaction and doesn't care what it is. If his gentle father curses at dying, then he will have expressed his suppressed bitterness, released his anger. This will be as a blessing to his son. There is also a paradox in the words "see with blinding sight." Sight that is so strong and clear, sight that receives the full impact

of knowledge's light in one moment must be blinding indeed. Eyes that realize happiness is important and possible during life can blaze with this knowledge, even when they are blind to other sights.

Most of the words in the poem are one syllable and end in consonants. Each word has to be fully pronounced before the next one can be spoken. This gives the poem a slow, deliberate pace that emphasizes the building emotion. There is much repetition of harsh and soft *g* sounds: "go," "against," "dying," "blinding," "good," "rage," "gentle," "age." Both consonant sounds have to be pronounced clearly. It is difficult to slur over them. Beginning consonant sounds are also often repeated. There is a repeated *s* sound in the second line of the quatrain that provides a break in the established pattern and gives the end of the poem a pleasing sibilance.

Most of the vowel sounds are long: "rage," "age," "blaze," "night," "dying." This also serves to lengthen each word so that, even though most of the words are mono-syllabic, the poem seems to contain many more sounds and encompass more time than it actually does. Sound and sense are united through the use of words that sound like the emotion or idea the poet is expressing. "Gentle" sounds easy and soft. "Burn," "rave" and "rage" sound angry. The constant interplay of soft and harsh sounds prevents the poem from being monotonous even though many words are used repeatedly.

The poem is written in iambic pentameter with end line masculine rhyme. There is a spondee in the second line of the first tercet, "Old age." The spondee slows the line, makes the father seem very tired, yet his son urges him to rouse himself. A trochee begins the first line of the third, fourth, and fifth tercets, breaking the expected pattern and emphasizing what the lines say.

In the title, Thomas substitutes an adjective, "gentle," for the adverb that would be grammatically correct. This introduces the speaker's unorthodox views and strengthens the image of a gentle man being urged to violent emotion. The title also seems to contain an allusion to the death-scene in *Hamlet*. Hamlet, after a troubled, questioning life, dies violently, in a sword fight he had no chance of winning because his opponent's blade was poisoned. At the moment of his death, his good friend Horatio says "Good-night sweet prince, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!" (V. ii. 50-1). There aren't any angels to sing people to their rest. Hamlet died violently, but still he died. Even if the poet's father rages and raves, he still must die. He must go into "that good night." Yet, it is not futile to struggle at the last, even though death cannot be defeated. Expressing a strong desire to live reaffirms the value of life for those who are not dying. The speaker needs to reassure himself that his life is worthwhile, that he will be strong enough to fight death when it comes and not give in easily. His father must struggle, both to assert himself and oppose death for one brief moment and to assure his son that it is possible to do so.

Dylan Thomas pours out strong, intense feelings on a very personal, yet general, subject. An individual's death concerns him most directly but it also affects his family. Death is an experience that will be shared by all, willing or not. Through his expert use of musical devices and imagery, he transforms the *villanelle* into a statement of great emotion. Wild anger and incredible dignity both exist within the poem. Both his purpose and his poetry are of a high order, making this a truly fine poem.

—ANNETTE CARSON

FRESHMAN CONTEST - 1980 First Prize Winner

WHAT ALONENESS MEANS

It all happened so suddenly. I had no time to get used to the idea. She had been a vital, young woman of sixty-three who had kept her body trim and firm, and since she and Dad had moved to Florida, she had become very tanned. Her hair was cut in a casual hair-do that responded well to the humidity, sun, and wind. She did not look old enough to be living in a retirement village, but the easy life agreed with her, and she was content until the hot summer. Then, she longed for her home and family in the North.

This hot, June Saturday, I was finishing preparations for their visit. We expected them to arrive the following day. At three o'clock, the phone rang, and I learned that Mother had suffered a series of strokes during traveling on Friday. With the help of the state police Dad had managed to get her to the neurological center at the University of Kentucky Hospital at Lexington, Kentucky. Judy, my sister, and our Uncle Jim had arranged to go there that afternoon to stay with Dad to learn how serious Mother's condition was. It was all so unreal. We had all looked after Dad for years. Mother had always been the stronger of the two, and here she was perhaps seriously ill.

By Sunday her condition had become worse. She had suffered a massive cerebral hemorrhage, and the prognosis was grim. The artery could not be surgically repaired because of its location; it meant irreversible brain injury. The doctors said that death could be within the next week or at the most within five weeks, unless Mother would set some kind of a new record. My sister and uncle decided to stay with Dad and wait with him. I was to remain at home, but would relieve them if the time became longer than a few days. They promised to call me when death seemed imminent.

I began to do what I knew had to be done. I made arrangements for my family in my absence and packed. By three o'clock Monday afternoon, I knew that I must get to Lexington. I called my husband who sensed the urgency in my voice, and he agreed to go with me. At midnight, we checked into the motel next to the hospital.

The next morning, I left our room early. I did not know if Mother had lived through the night, or where the rest of the family was. I found my father's car, and seeing a light underneath his motel room door, I knocked. He answered it as if he had been waiting for someone to call, and when he saw who it was, he started to cry. We went inside and held each other and cried for some time.

I had seen many older family members chronically ill awaiting death. I thought that I was prepared for what was to come, but this experience was like nothing I had ever seen before. Mother was dressed in a white linen-like sarong, and she was placed on a wooden slat that I later learned could be moved to exercise individual parts of the patient's body. She was tilted so that her injured head was about a foot higher than her feet, and her left side was higher than her right side. She did not look ill, only very tired. Her long, trim suntanned legs were uncovered as were her arms. She did not look like she was in bed and except for all the tubes and monitoring screens, it was unbelievable that she should be here. I was afraid to go near her. Some thoughtful nurse came over to me and explained that Mother was bleeding again, and that she could not last more than one hour. The nurse went on to explain that often the hearing is the last sense to leave, and she encouraged me to speak to Mother if I wished. I quietly walked over to Mother. I felt as an intruder upon her person and privacy; she had always been a proper and dignified person. I hoped that she did not know how she was at this moment. I knew that she was trapped somewhere in that body—how was I to reach her? My thoughts poured out in a childish sort of rhythm. I told her who I was, that I had arrived in time, how glad I was to see her one more time, how much I loved her, what a wonderful mother she had been, and how much I would miss her. I wanted to say so much more, but I could only think to tell her that we would stay close to Dad. Her aloneness nearly smothered me. I realized in one swift second that I had never really known her. I could not believe that at a time as paramount as this that I could be so insignificant and ineffectual. Nearly overwhelmed with emotion, I merely stayed beside her and held her hand.

The days of grief were perhaps normal enough. People were wonderfully understanding and generously loving to all of us. They came, some into the home, and shared our sorrow. Our healing took different courses at different paces, and the emotions ran their gamut. Over a period of time, our memories started emerging from the last, vivid details. Each of us had some remembrance of her person. When this period began to blend into the every day routine again, however, my self would not be content with a few mementos or recollections.

What tormented me was her terrible aloneness. In the end, she was completely isolated—devastatingly alone. Her sudden illness gave no warning; it felled her so completely that she had no moment to prepare for the end. As I searched for the truth, I tried to talk to others about this aloneness. No one seemed to identify with it in the way that I

did. Some asked, "How could your Mother have been alone? She had her family with her, didn't she?" Yes, we were there. But recalling our helplessness and isolation from each other, I felt this had to be terribly inadequate. At the time my heart was breaking, yet I could not pour out its content accurately as I could not even organize my feelings. There was only one word to describe her plight, and that was aloneness. I could not communicate what was slowly becoming an obsession. I began to wonder whether I was a fool who could not understand some simple fact of life that everybody else already knew, or whether I was wise beyond my years and was grappling with a thought the rest of the world had not uncovered.

I would awaken at night in a cold sweat, and the vision of her body on that wooden slab would become as a white ghost. I can remember my self crying out, "Oh, Mom, all alone, all alone." This same ghost-like vision came to me during my work—during anything. I could not have a conversation without the vision blocking my concentration. I lost weight, and for a period of time I was so distracted and troubled that I was afraid I was having a breakdown, whatever that was. For weeks, I would not touch an aspirin, or tea, or cola as I was so concerned that I might become addicted to anything that would relieve the pain that I physically felt in every part of my body. Finally, one day I decided that there was only one thing that I could do, and that was to remain strong and wait for it to pass. And, then, one day it was quieted.

When I finally surrendered, I saw clearly that as persons we are alone, each and every one of us. With this realization came the understanding that our aloneness, or separateness, is the quality that makes each of us the unique individual that we are. We are the only person with our own set of thoughts and feelings. Through love, concern, and interest another can glimpse them, but will never be able to see the whole picture. When I could admit my own absolute separateness, I knew that I have been clinging to my mother as an illusion of safety. Somehow, I thought that I could depend upon another to keep me safe from my aloneness. But I have learned that nothing can protect me from my own mortality or from the vulnerability of aloneness.

Today, I am at peace with my self. I no longer feel bound by the same expectations of myself, of life, or of others around me. I know that my full development as a person is not reached yet, and certainly, I don't know what lies ahead. But now I listen to the quiet voice that is within me. I am finding that it has the strength and judgment to guide me toward a full and rich life by my being able to savor each experience as if it were a rare moment never to be repeated.

—JEAN E. JOHNSON

Second Prize Winner

MEMORIES

Two men were influential in my life, my grandfather and my uncle. I spent a good part of my summer vacations with these men, and I remember those days with warm and happy thoughts.

From my grandfather I learned the beauty of flowers and the warmth and the sting of the written word. My grandfather was a florist in Rockport, Indiana. He was also an amateur poet, a former mine worker, and a union organizer. Above all, he was a sweet and gentle man who always seemed to have time for his grandchildren.

I remember one hot, summer day sitting on a stool in grandpa's flower shop listening in rapt attention as he recited poems about Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War. As he recited, I watched his fingers deftly arrange the flowers to form a spray for an Eastern Star installation. Since grandpa was the only florist east of Evansville, he handled all the weddings, funerals, graduations, and lodge "doings" as he called them.

Grandpa didn't cook at home; he had sleeping quarters above his shop, but if somebody didn't remind him to eat, he would pass the day without tasting food. Besides, there just wasn't enough room in his private quarters for anything more than his books and his bed. Grandpa had more books than a library or at least I thought so at

the time. What meals grandpa did eat were taken at the small cafe which served as the unofficial town hall. Every small town seems to have a meeting place of this sort. Here grandpa held court with the local dignitaries from the sheriff to the president of the school board. He was outrageously pampered by the owners of the cafe who took great delight in preparing meals they knew he would enjoy.

I learned at a very early age the esteem and love these provincial people held for my grandpa. His opinions and judgments were sought by young and old alike. Grandpa had a way of using subtle humor and the wisdom of his years to strike an accord between factions of the town.

As the years passed and I grew, I didn't get back to grandpa's shop very often. Last year on vacation, my husband and I passed through Rockport, and I stopped at the flower shop. The shop seemed suspended in time for so little had changed about it. The big walk-in refrigerator was still there, the greenhouses, the fields of flowers behind the shop, even the name was the same. I think the most overpowering aspect of entering the flower shop after all those years was the wonderful fragrance. I can enter flower shops now and be reminded of grandpa's shop, but no shop carries quite the same fragrance as grandpa's. Because it seemed so real, my memory was jarred, and I fully expected to see grandpa standing at the table arranging his flowers.

Each year at Christmas, Grandpa would send each of his children a poinsettia plant. I have such vivid memories of those beautiful plants coming that I cannot bring myself to send one to my mother. A Christmas poinsettia plant began with and ended with grandpa.

Grandpa fulfilled his last wish — to see my brother and I graduate from high school. He died in October following our June graduation.

From my silly, eccentric uncle I learned to laugh at myself. Uncle Cecil was one of those rare individuals who could look at a person and draw out their good, decent qualities, no matter how deeply they were hidden.

Uncle Cecil firmly believed that children should play and be happy and carefree. My most wonderful times were spent romping in a warm summer shower in nothing but my underwear and splashing in his rain barrel.

My aunt and uncle lived along the Ohio River, close enough to Evansville to allow my uncle proximity to his job, but far enough in the country to favor the raising of chickens and planting what seemed to me the largest garden in the world.

Uncle Cecil was fun-loving and carefree, but my Aunt Katherine was prim and unbending. My uncle referred to my aunt as "the secretary of war", especially when entreating on my behalf for a concession of ice cream or a trip to the local swimming pool. Only years later would I come to realize the affection associated with the term. At the time I thought he was being delightfully disrespectful.

One of Uncle Cecil's favorite tricks to play on my aunt was training one or two of his chickens to enter my aunt's summer kitchen. My aunt believed everything had its place, and this definitely did not include chickens in her spotless summer kitchen. Uncle Cecil would intermittently place corn on the path leading to the kitchen. Since chickens are curious, the last kernel of corn would lead them to the bottom step of the summer kitchen, and it would be just a matter of time before they were inside the summer kitchen. Only moments would pass before the chickens would come flying out the door in a flurry of feathers, just ahead of my aunt wielding her broom like a machete slashing through a jungle rain forest. Oh, what great fun for a child!

Grandpa and Uncle Cecil, father and son, died and were buried on the same day, twenty-two years apart. I feel a deep, personal loss with the passing of these men, but I am so grateful I knew them and for their impact on my life.

—BARBARA HOUGH

Third Prize Winner

ZERO IS AS ZERO DOES

Zero stands for nothing; this is what we were all taught, and it is probably one of the

few universally remembered and understood lessons of grade school. This definition makes perfect sense as long as we confine ourselves to the set of the positive integers; i.e., the natural numbers. Zero does function as an endpoint of this set, since it is the smallest possible positive integer. This position at the end of the positive integers has given credence to the superficial idea that zero symbolizes simply nothing.

The superficiality of the concept can be readily seen by the simple step of including the negative integers as part of the system, thus obtaining the whole numbers. Now, zero stands in the center of the system in between positive and negative infinity. Does this mean the negative integers are in some sense less than nothing? If we accept this idea, we are left with some puzzling problems; namely, our temperature scales (with the exception of the absolute or Kelvin scale) contain temperatures which are less than nothing. Also sounds below the threshold of normal human hearing must be expressed in negative numbers when using the decibel scale; hence, they would also be less than nothing. Obviously, the concept of zero as merely a symbol for nothing needs revision.

One method of definition open to us is that of definition by usage. The most common usage definition of zero is that of "place holder". I put the term "place holder" in quotes because I really do not know what exactly the term means, aside from the nondefinition I received along with so many grade schoolers that a "place holder" was a number to be inserted when there was no other more useful number to take its place, but we still wanted people to know we could put something there if we wanted to. There is no particular reason for choosing zero as a "place holder". Any number will do, and in some computers nine is used as the "place holder". This technique is known as ones complement notation.

In order to avoid the vagueness of the term "place holder" I will use the term "positional indicator". To define positional indicator we must examine what exactly the function of zero is in this context. One way to do this is to express numbers as the sum of a series of terms which will have as coefficients the actual digits of the number. A convenient way to do this is to use the method of scientific notation. In scientific notation a real mantissa is multiplied by a characteristic power of ten; for example, 100 becomes 1.0×10^2 . This technique can now be used to produce the required series. As an example consider the number 0.4568. This number can be expressed as $4 \times 10^{-1} + 5 \times 10^{-2} + 6 \times 10^{-3} + 8 \times 10^{-4}$. Even though the number represents a rational fraction, it can be expressed as a series of integer coefficients and powers of ten. Now, a number such as 100 becomes $1 \times 10^2 + 0 \times 10^1 + 0 \times 10^0$. Here it can be seen that zero in its positional usage functions merely as the smallest positive integer. It is not placed in this series simply to "hold the place" till some better number comes along; rather, it is precisely the number we want.

Now we come to another problem hinted at in the beginning of this paper. If zero stands in the center of the whole numbers, is it then the smallest positive integer or the largest negative integer? It turns out that both cases are equally easy to prove (See appendix). This dichotomy of sign is unique to the number zero. This curious ambiguity of sign stems from another property of zero, the identity property. Zero is what is known as the identity element of the real numbers under addition, and it is this property that leads to this dichotomy of sign. A number's sign is determined by its behavior under the operation of addition. The identity element, however, behaves the same no matter what sign is assigned to it, and it is for this reason that zero is usually assumed to be neither positive or negative. From this identity property also comes the fact that any number times zero equals zero.

The statement in the last sentence is not completely correct. We need one more postulate in order to justify it. This postulate is the postulate of closure under all arithmetic operations. Closure means simply that whenever we perform an arithmetic operation on a member of the set of real numbers we always obtain a member of that set. Without zero the set of real numbers is not closed under addition or multiplication. We can go on to make a more sweeping generalization and say that zero must be present in any set of mathematical objects in order for that set to form what is known as a field. The number of objects which can be dealt with in terms of operations on a field is incredible. This concept is found in areas as widely separated as the theory of differential equations and the study of campanology.

Zero is far more than a symbol for nothing. It is a basic building block of not only our number system, but it is also the source of many rich concepts in mathematics. It would be wise for our elementary teachers to re-examine their attitudes towards the zero.

APPENDIX

Let $a \in +I$ (The positive integers). Then if $a < 0$ there exists some $b \in +I$ such that $b + a = 0$. But if $a + b = 0$, then $a = -b$. Since $b \in +I$ by hypothesis this result is a contradiction, hence there is no $a < 0$ such that $a \in +I$.

If there is a number $a \in -I$ (The negative integers) such that $a > 0$, then it can be obtained by adding some number $b \in -I$ to 0, i.e., $b + 0 > 0$. But this implies that $b > 0$ and violates the assumption that $b < 0$, therefore there is no number $a \in -I$ such that $a > 0$.

—JOHN KEIL

OPEN CONTEST First Prize Winner

CAMBERLAIN

Tim MacLeod thrust his fists into the pockets of his worn denim jacket for protection against the raw damp morning and rocked impatiently back on his heels. The movement dragged on the reins he held in his right hand, and the big red horse startled crabwise in the bridle, his large luminous eyes expectant. Automatically Tim reached to calm him, stroking the restive neck with a practiced, sure hand while he stared up the barn aisle, impatiently waiting for the burly figure of Linus O'Guin to materialize out of the heavy morning fog. But the aisle held only an eerie yellow light cast by a single harsh light bulb glaring against the damp mist, and the muffled rustling of unseen horses moving about their dark stalls.

Raging against the tardiness of the trainer which left him standing in the cold dark morning with a handful of saddled, hot-blooded racehorse, Tim moved to calm the restive animal, his eyes running again over the flat, powerful legs and deep chest, the long, thin neck, the tiny ears, the huge expressive eyes, and the large, flaring nostrils. The horse was what his conformation and mien promised—the highly conditioned and volatile end-product of an intensive breeding program combining impeccable thoroughbred lineages, proud and arrogant in his youth, his strength, his promise, and in what he had already accomplished in his first racing season.

"We'll not see his life again in our lifetime," Linus, the graying veteran of a half-century of thoroughbred training, had said flatly when the raw-boned, awkward colt was first unloaded in front of his barn nearly a year before. The very lack of emotion in his voice had carried the conviction that emotion would not have. And the knowledge gained from countless horses passing through his arthritic hands over the years had proved out: Camberlain was undefeated in his first season against a crop of brilliant young thoroughbreds whose excellence had been unparalleled for many seasons past.

The stallion pushed against him roughly. Tim moved his hand across the horse's head, tracing the familiar, delicate yet powerful bone structure. He did not fool himself—there was a strong bond between them. Camberlain trusted him instinctively; and there was a communication, a responsiveness between them that transcended speech. Linus had recognized it at once.

"You've a good pair of hands," he said, "but not the head to go with them yet. Time, Tim, there's time still," when Tim wanted to replace Mick as Camberlain's exercise boy. Instead, he exercised whatever Linus sent his way, walked hots, mucked stalls, and cleaned tack, and his resentment grew. He watched as Mick hand-galloped the red stallion through the early morning hours, feeling himself that tremendous power between his knees, the thrust of tightly coiled, steel-sprung muscles, the long rolling stride, the eager mouth against the bit asking for more speed, and he knew there was more for him in Camberlain than Mick or any jockey would ever get.

The stocky figure of Linus loomed out of the mist, accompanied by the wizened rider. Silently, resentfully, Tim stood by Camberlain's head as Linus gave Mick a leg up into the saddle.

"Slow gallop, then let him out the last quarter and bring him back slow. He's wanting to run bad—want to remind him who's boss."

Mick nodded as he pulled the leathers between his fingers, and Linus directed his attention to Tim.

"Head over to the steward's office and get 'n inspector over here before nine to check Madam Sarah. Post time's at three."

The barns were beginning to stir with activity as grooms readied nervous, streamlined mounts for work-outs, or slowly walked cooler-draped horses, fading and reappearing in the coiling, drifting mist.

Tim climbed over the rail fence into the paddock and struck into the fog. Behind him, the world dropped away as sharply as if a curtain had been drawn against a window. He was the sole inhabitant of a silent, white void. The long grass grabbed wetly at his boots as he pushed his way through it, and the sound of his passage was curiously deadened. A sense of isolation grew in him; and when the tall black shape suddenly loomed out of the mist in front of him, he could not help stepping back quickly. Almost as quickly, he recognized it and shook his head at his own uneasiness.

Beneath the stone, which stood nearly as tall and wide as a man, were buried the remains of Grey Condor, the legendary stakes' winner of an earlier generation. Retired undefeated at the height of his career because of chronic leg problems, the horse had been returned to the track after his death and buried with due ceremony at the scene of his greatest victories. His greatness was undisputed, for he had earned his victories honestly and "on heart and two good legs," horsemen said. But his reputation was not unblemished. He had been a rogue—a dangerous horse feared by grooms and jockeys alike. He had hated men and other horses with equal vehemence, and nothing was safe within range of his teeth or hooves. Legends had grown around his viciousness, and they had not diminished long years after his death. A great horse lives forever in the memories of horsemen who have seen him run, and Grey Condor had been one of the greatest. And the legends continued to grow in racetrack circles, for the grooms superstitiously believed that the horse haunted the grounds in ceaseless search for a challenger worthy of his merit. Tim had dismissed the stories with the scorn he felt they deserved, and he dismissed them now as he turned away from the monument and continued on his way.

A dim dark blur appearing momentarily through the shifting mist showed him the line of trees marching down the fence that divided the two paddocks, and he quickened his pace, grateful that his walk was halfway over, and aware of a ridiculous sense of uneasiness growing over him. A thin pale light filtered through the fog. The sun was gaining strength; soon it would burn off the dense whiteness. Tim shoved his hands into his pockets and shrugged his head into his collar against the damp.

"A cup of coffee before I go back," he thought. "Linus will—"

He started back at a sudden, silent movement under the trees. He stood still, trying to pierce the fog, but the elusive whiteness had closed again. He waited, curiosity overcoming caution. A dense patch of white superimposed itself against the lighter fog, and then detached itself. Sinuous, snaky head and neck, long, raw-boned body and legs—the horse walked toward him, his ears pinned flat against his head.

"Grey Condor," Tim breathed as the horse brushed in front of him. His flesh, though cold, was solid—"like cold marble," Tim marveled as he touched the shoulder. The horse stopped and swung his head around to look at Tim with angry eyes. Although his skin quivered, he did not flinch away from Tim's hand, but stood unmoving. Cautiously Tim rested his arm across the high sharp withers and leaned against the angular shoulder, his muscles tensed against a sudden movement if the horse whirled on him. Grey Condor stood motionless beneath his weight. Emboldened, Tim did not hesitate any longer. Grabbing a handful of mane, he sprang up and swung his leg over the horse's back. Instantly the gray horse jumped forward. Tim twisted his hands into the damp ropy tendrils of mane and leaned over the horse's neck as they thundered down the paddock. Elation overrode whatever fear he might have felt, for here was the power and speed that he had seen and felt in Camberlain. The flat, powerful muscles contracted and expanded in long, rhythmic strides that carried no feeling of strain or effort. The ground flew away beneath his hooves, but there was still speed to be called on, and

Tim reveled in the knowledge. This was what it felt like to ride a great one—to ride Camberlain.

On Grey Condor ran through the fog. The paddock fence loomed before them; the horse gathered himself and lifted without hesitation in his stride. They thundered through the barns, and Tim laughed aloud as shouting grooms and panic-stricken horses scattered before their headlong path. He caught sudden glimpses of terrified faces, heard shouts of anger and fear, saw rearing, plunging, running horses, and his blood grew hot with exultation. Just as suddenly, the barns were behind them and lost from view.

Grey Condor headed unerringly down the wide grassy lane that led from the barns to the track. The fog was thinner now, and Tim could plainly see the low fence on either side and the gap ahead that opened onto the track. As they burst onto the track, Tim saw Camberlain galloping easily, his head and neck flexed and his stride loose and fluid, less than an eighth of a mile ahead of them.

Grey Condor quickened beneath him, and Tim's blood sang as he understood the challenge. It would be an unequal contest—that of proven greatness against unproven potential—but he was confident of the outcome. His Camberlain was greater than any horse living or dead, and it would be proven now, and he, Tim MacLeod, would be part of the legend that would grow over the years as horsemen told of the greatest race ever run between the greatest thoroughbreds that had ever breathed.

Rapidly Grey Condor drew up on the red horse. Tim saw Mick turn his head, saw his eyes widen with fear, and saw him begin to pull Camberlain down. It was too late. Grey Condor was upon them with a scream of shrill rage. With the arrogance and spirit to which he had been bred, Camberlain answered with his own shrill scream and bolted against Mick's hands.

The two horses leaped stride for stride down the track. For the first time, Tim felt a thrill of fear as he realized that both he and Mick were helpless passengers astride two elemental spirits battling heedlessly for supremacy. Head to head the two horses raced, and Tim tasted pride as Camberlain matched the gray horse as relentlessly as a shadow. The red horse's chest and flanks were flecked with foam and his nostrils flared redly, but he ran determinedly apace with the gray horse. It may have been seconds or minutes—Tim had no sense of time passing—when he saw the red horse falter in his stride, and his heart jumped in sudden fear. Camberlain's strength was giving out, and still Grey Condor ran as steadily as a machine, with no sign of distress.

"Come on, Camberlain!" he whispered. "Don't give up now! Run! Run!"

As though the red horse heard and understood, he summoned a last burst of speed, his labored breath sounding as harshly and heavily in Tim's ears as his own pounding heart. And as suddenly, the sun burst through the fog, and the mist began to rise from the ground.

As the light fell upon him, Grey Condor screamed and leaped. He rose into the air; and as they climbed higher with the rapidly dissipating fog, Tim felt the solidness of the body beneath him fail and drift away as smoke before the wind.

The last thing he saw as he fell was Camberlain, the foam pouring like streams of water down his heaving flanks, his eyes wild and unseeing, his head and neck bent in agony and defeat. And the last thing he knew as he fell was that Camberlain would never run again. Grey Condor had won his final race.

—SUSAN E. HOWARD

Second Prize Winner

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE AND *THE SCARLET LETTER*

Nathaniel Hawthorne, in *The Scarlet Letter*, illustrates differing perceptions of reality by the tensions and conflicts the characters undergo during the course of the novel. Each of the principal characters has a specific philosophic context from within which he or she acts and reacts. Laying the gridwork of his concept of allegory upon the tale, Hawthorne arrives at his own philosophical position by showing the inadequacy of the

current system of thought of his day, a Transcendentalism rooted in Puritanism and Rationalism. Hawthorne's genius manifests itself in his ability to understand and to illustrate the psyches of his characters in confronting an act and its consequent guilt. He chooses to deal with the question of how the characters see themselves in light of their perception of what is real and what is not. By avoiding absolutes and judgments he attacks both Puritanism and Transcendentalism. Man is neither ultimately good nor evil, he seems to imply, but rather a paradox within whom both aspects reside and must therefore be acknowledged.

Each of the four major characters of the novel have a different perception of the realities and the implications of the act, adultery, which itself occurs prior to the beginning of the novel. The act is less significant than its subsequent effect upon the psyches of the characters. Hawthorne makes it clear what that effect is when he writes, "And be the stern and sad truth spoken, that the breach which guilt has once made into the human soul is never, in this mortal state, repaired." As such, in this novel of the reality of ideas, the Puritan mentality is represented by Dimmesdale, the Transcendental mentality by Hester, the Rational perspective by Chillingworth, and finally Hawthorne's own position by Pearl.

The primary contrast of perception in the novel is that existing between Dimmesdale and Hester. Dimmesdale's Puritan belief in the innate vileness of man after the fall from Eden whose sole salvation lay in Christ conflicts with the Transcendental position that within every man himself lay the possibility of transcending man as he was and potentially becoming another Adam. In the chapter, "A Flood of Sunshine," wherein Dimmesdale considers fleeing with Hester, he thinks of himself as being "... irrevocably doomed" in contrast to Hester for whom "the tendency of her fate and fortune had been to set her free." Dimmesdale could no more escape "... from the dungeon of his own heart" than he could breathe, as Hester could, "... the wild, free atmosphere of an unredeemed, unchristianized, lawless region." Hawthorne says of Dimmesdale, "... [he] had never gone through an experience calculated to lead him beyond the scope of generally received laws."

Dimmesdale sees himself as being lost and is thereby immobilized and estranged from the only reality he knows. He is incapable of acting without the Puritan framework of which he is a part. Hester says to him:

"Leave this wreck and ruin here where it hath happened! Meddle no more with it! Begin all anew! Hast thou exhausted possibility in the failure of one trial? Not so! The future is yet full of trial and success. There is happiness to be enjoyed! There is good to be done! Exchange this false life for a true one Preach! Write! Act! Do anything, save to lie down and die! Give up this name of Arthur Dimmesdale, and make thyself another, and a high one, such as thou canst wear without fear or shame. Why shouldst thou tarry so much as one other day in the torments that have so gnawed into thy life!—that have made thee feeble to will and to do!—that will leave thee powerless even to repent! Up and away!"

In this crucial passage Hester tries to free Dimmesdale from his constrictive past and to create his own future. Yet Dimmesdale cannot look forward. He is not free to do so with the spectre of original sin looming in his consciousness. Looking back at the fallen Adam, he feels that, "There is not the strength or courage left me to venture into the wide, strange, difficult world, alone!"

Just as Dimmesdale's position is untenable and self-destructive, so too is Hester's belief that she might cast away the, "Shame, Despair, Solitude!" which had been her lot by casting away the exterior manifestations of her guilt—her cap and the scarlet letter—in the forest. Pearl, her progeny, forces her to assume her past and her guilt.

Dimmesdale and Hester were as incompatible as Puritanism and Transcendentalism.

By dealing in absolutes they negated their present realities. Pearl, the product of a paradoxical conjunction, understood and did become free because she accepted both the joy and the guilt of the union which was responsible for her being. She was humane as neither Hester nor Dimmesdale could ever be. Pearl married and was not “estranged” or “outlawed” from her society. She did not willfully choose to be apart from humankind as her mother did. She accepted her past and herself and went on with her life. She is the only character for whom the future seems to hold any measure of happiness.

Chillingsworth, the Rationalist, attempts to hurt coldly Dimmesdale and thereby Hester. His humanity is given over to his desire to know at any cost and then to destroy the real father of his wife’s child. He himself, as rationalism itself, was too old and crippled to father beauty and naturalness. He becomes physically gross and divorced from the rest of humanity in his attempt to destroy the possibility of faith.

In his preoccupation with psychological hurdles and the truths revealed thereby, Hawthorne becomes a precursor of the modern novelist. In this sense, *The Scarlet Letter* is a precursor of the modern novel’s preoccupation with the question of what reality is for an individual bereft of the solace of a shared universal faith or ideology. Hawthorne’s journey into the psyches of his characters reveals the paradox that evil as well as good lies within each person. The Puritan ethic as represented by Dimmesdale became untenable. Its emphasis upon the dark side of man, or, in Carl Jung’s terms, the “shadow,” was as one-sided as the Transcendental failure to acknowledge that it would exist even in the “new Adam.” Pearl, who confronts and accepts the guilt of her mother rather than flinging the unflingable away, reflects Hawthorne’s own acceptance of both the dark side of himself and of his legacy. Only by accepting the paradox of good and evil existing side by side within all of us, Hawthorne implies, can we live realistically, if not necessarily happily, within our mental universes.

—EDWARD ERSLOVAS

Third Prize Winner

PEARL: NATURE’S LOVE CHILD OR DEVIL’S DAUGHTER

Nathaniel Hawthorne was strongly influenced by both the legacy of authoritative, unyielding Puritan ethics dictated by his ancestors and the freethinking, emotional ideals of the revolutionary Romantic Movement.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne has embodied this dichotomy of principles in Hester Prynne’s conflicting and fluxuating conception of her illegitimate daughter, Pearl. Although Hester sincerely loves Pearl, she is in continuous awe of her. As Hester struggles to comprehend Pearl, she is tortured and torn between the Puritan judgment of Pearl as a tainted, shameful by-product of the unpardonable sin of immoral passion and her own instinctive vision of Pearl as an unspoiled, natural creation of sacred love.

As Hester emerges from the prison to which she had been sent for committing adultery—a crime uncompromisingly judged as a sin against God and society—her initial impulse is to clutch Pearl to her bosom, where the proclamation of her guilt is emblazoned in a fiery letter A. However, she rejects this as a futile effort, since “one token of shame would but poorly serve to hide another.”

Although Hester seems resigned to her shame and guilt, her unresolved state of mind becomes apparent during her official chastisement in the market-place. While in the very midst of paying an humiliating public penance for her crime, her mind relives the past. This regression is so complete that, when she again becomes aware of her present surroundings, she feels the urgent need to touch the symbol of shame on her bosom and hear her daughter’s cry to prove to herself that they really exist!

In choosing to name her daughter “Pearl” (which means “as being of great price”), Hester demonstrates her contrasting vision of her daughter as both a costly price to pay for an impulsive sin and (at the same time) the “sole treasure” she possesses.

As a result of her Puritan belief that an “evil deed” is doomed to corrupt consequences, Hester fearfully searches for some “wild peculiarity” in Pearl’s nature to cor-

respond with the associated guilt of Hester's sin. And as Pearl's wild and uncontrollable nature emerges, Hester views it as a direct result of the "impassioned state" that led to Hester's shame and Pearl's birth.

Hester associates Pearl so closely with her disgrace that she designs an elaborate scarlet gown for Pearl which becomes a perfect representation of the scarlet letter weighing so heavily on Hester's mind and heart. It is as if both the gown and Pearl become Hester's symbol "endowed with life."

Ironically, it is through Pearl's obsession with her mother's scarlet letter that Hester suffers deepest. From the very first day that Pearl becomes fascinated with it:

... except when the child was asleep, Hester had never felt a moment's safety; not a moment's calm enjoyment of her.

However, when the Puritan society threatens to take Pearl away from her, Hester becomes provoked "to little less than madness" and fiercely fights against the authorities. In her desperation she frantically demands the aid of Pearl's secret father, Reverend Dimmesdale.

It is within Dimmesdale's poignant portrayal of Pearl that Hester's contradictory conceptions concerning her daughter are most clearly depicted. While describing Pearl's nature as being "peculiar", Dimmesdale perceives the relationship between Hester and Pearl as possessing a "quality of awful sacredness." He earnestly declares Pearl's existence to be a "solemn miracle" which is meant both as her mother's "one blessing" in life and as:

a retribution too; a torture, to be felt at many an unthought of moment; a pang, a sting, and ever-recurring agony, in the midst of a troubled joy!

Although acknowledging her shame and guilt concerning the circumstances of Pearl's birth, no matter how hard she tries, Hester cannot reconcile herself to feel truly repentant. She simply cannot believe that a joyous love which she sincerely believes "had a consecration of its own" could be evil.

Hester's natural rebellion against an authoritarian society that condemns her love as immoral and her instinctive pride in Pearl (as the physical symbol of this sacred love) are apparent in the blatant manner in which she chooses to dress her daughter. While strictly adhering to the severe Puritan code of meager subsistence and sombre dress for herself, Hester lavishes her money and her unbridled imagination on Pearl's attire. "With a morbid purpose" she sews "gorgeous robes" made from the "richest tissues that could be procured." In this attire Pearl becomes "the very brightest little jet of flame that ever danced upon the earth." Such an obvious flaunting of a product of sin would have been unthinkable to the Puritan society.

But, as her daughter grows so does Hester's sense of bewilderment and apprehension. Hester often thinks she sees a "laughing image of a fiend peeping out" of Pearl's eyes and fears that her daughter is possessed by an evil spirit. She begins to wonder if there is any truth in the Puritan's opinion that Pearl is a "demon offspring" and "imp of evil" who has been "evoked by some irregularity of conjuration." In agony Hester drops to her knees crying:

"O Father in Heaven,—if thou art still my Father,—what is this being which I have brought into the world!"

Despite Hester's fears about Pearl's emotional state, she makes no attempt to impose the harsh penalties employed by the Puritans to punish their offspring while shaping them into virtuous citizens of the community. Instead she attempts a much gentler and more flexible guidance. However, as with the unrestrained passions of Hester's past, (which Pearl's nature seems to parallel) Hester's attempts at control fail miserably.

The Puritan doctrine which Jonathan Edwards succinctly described as “liberation from the senses” exerts a tremendous influence over Hester’s conception of her daughter. She recognizes the “warfare of her own spirit” in Pearl’s rebellion against rules and her wild abandonment to impulse and emotion. And it is the Puritan’s rigid, cold, unsympathetic judgment of Pearl as a corrupt product begotten through Hester’s sins of passion, impulse, and individuality which fills Hester with guilt, shame and fear.

Yet, Hester’s “native courage” simultaneously embraces the free-thinking spirit of romanticism. Hester is instinctively delighted with the “sterling attributes” of Pearl which she describes as:

. . . the steadfast principles of an unflinching courage,—an uncontrollable will,—a sturdy pride, which might be disciplined into self-respect,—and a bitter scorn of many things, which when examined might be found to have the taint of falsehood in them . . . affections, too, though hitherto acrid and disagreeable, as are the richest flavors of unripe fruit.

In admiring Pearl’s inherited qualities Hester is reaffirming her natural belief in the very principles that the Puritan code condemns.

The great romanticist Ralph Waldo Emerson stated, “In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life,—no disgrace, no calamity (leaving me my eyes), which nature cannot repair.” And so, appropriately, it is in the forest that Hester finally begins to accept some of her own instinctive values—and in so doing, truly accepts Pearl.

—KAREN SPOLYAR

BIOGRAPHIES

Daniel Bazin, Jr., began his work at PNC in the Spring of '79, majoring in Construction Technology. He is from Valparaiso.

Annette Carson graduated from PNC in May of 1979 with a BA in English. She is from Westville and is now employed by the LaPorte Chamber of Commerce.

Edward Erslovas, formerly in business in Chicago is enrolled in HSSE as an English major. He is from Michigan City and is currently editor of the *RAPPORT*.

Barbara Hough, reentering PNC for the Spring '81 semester, is a community college student working towards entering Nursing. She is from Michigan City.

Susan Howard, who resides in Valparaiso, began her studies at PNC in the Summer of '78 and is a humanities student majoring in English teaching. She is currently on the staff of the student newspaper.

Jean Johnson is in the Bridge Program. She is from Michigan City and began her studies at PNC in the Fall of '78.

John Keil, an engineering major since starting at PNC in the Fall of 1973, is from LaPorte.

Michael Marriott, formerly a Computer Technology major at PNC, is from Michigan City and is now going to school and living in Illinois.

Karen Spolyar is an English major from Valparaiso. She began her studies at PNC in the Spring of '76.

